

1st Samuel

Lesson 7

Chapter 3

e) Samuel's Call

(1) When it Occurred (3:1)

As Samuel grew each year, he learned more about the ministry at the Tabernacle complex. Indeed it was a center of great joy as hundreds, if not thousands, of people came each year to present their offerings to the LORD. As we have already learned, even the LORD found favor with Samuel (2:26). Some years later, after he arrived, Samuel would himself hear from the LORD. We will call it Samuel's call. First, we see when it occurred in chapter 3, verse 1. *"Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD before Eli. And word from the LORD was rare in those days, visions were infrequent."* (3:1)

Samuel was not considered a man as yet in this passage. He called himself a "boy" because he was still young when the LORD spoke to him. How young? We do not know. How old? We do not know. In Judaism today, a boy reaches adulthood when he turns thirteen. Just in case you are wondering, when a girl reaches adulthood, she does that at age twelve. However, the age of thirteen for a boy to become a man did not become the practice until 1342 A.D., about twenty-five hundred years after this point in Samuel's life. In the whole of the Bible, a man reached the "age of majority" at age twenty when he was eligible for war and taxation. Therefore, what can we say about this? Samuel called himself a boy at the time of this writing in the book by his name because he had not yet turned twenty when the LORD called him. How close to twenty was he? We do not know. However, we might rightly reckon, according to the time markers in the Scripture, that this call of Samuel happened before Samson was born. If that be the case, the LORD had not appeared to speak to anyone since the time He appeared to Gideon about sixty years before (Judges 6:11).

Samuel says that a *"word from the LORD was rare in those days, visions were infrequent."* If our search through the Bible is correct, it had been about sixty years since anyone heard a word from the LORD. After the LORD speaks to Samuel in this vision recorded in this passage, the LORD will appear to speak to Mr. and Mrs. Manoah concerning the birth of Samson.

Now we must make sure we understand the timeline. About sixty years before, the LORD appeared to Gideon. Then, on the very day that the LORD would call to Samuel, the LORD had delivered the dreadful message to Eli that we studied in chapter 2 of this book. Later, after the call of Samuel, the LORD will speak to Mr. and Mrs. Manoah. With that clear, we can move on to where Samuel's call occurred.

(2) Where it Occurred (3:2-4)

Samuel now tells where it occurred. Verse 2. *"It happened at that time as Eli was lying down in his place (now his eyesight had begun to grow dim and he could not see well),³ and the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD where the ark of God was,⁴ that the LORD called Samuel; and he said, 'Here I am.'* (3:2-4)

The words "at that time" refer back to the LORD's message to Eli covered in chapter 2. The LORD had spoken to Eli "as Eli was lying down in his place." Eli had a permanent tent as his home in the vicinity of the Tabernacle Complex. His sons also had their tents. As was the day's custom, Eli had his tent, and his wife had a separate tent. The same was the custom for his sons and their wives. Also in the vicinity were tents for the visiting priests who would come on a regular schedule to work with Eli and his sons. When the Temple is built by Solomon, rooms will be included in the structure

for the homes of the High Priest as well as the other priests and those who come to visit and serve in a week of service by a lottery that was set in place by King David. But for now, Eli was lying down in his own tent not far from the Tabernacle.

Samuel was in the Holy Place, the front room of the Tabernacle, where the seven stemmed lamp permanently sat. It must have been Samuel's job to at the oil at the proper time to keep the lamp burning. The word "temple" used in verse 3 is incorrect. No temple of the LORD existed at that time; at least, it was not called a temple. The Temple would not be built by Solomon for at least a hundred years. The verse should use the word *Tabernacle*. In the Tabernacle, behind the front room called the *Holy Place*, a second room was found called the *Holy of Holies*. It was in the *Holy of Holies* that the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD sat. The Tabernacle was actually one big tent that sat inside a larger tent called the *Tent of Meeting*. The Tabernacle tent was divided into two rooms by the Veil. The front room was the *Holy Place*; the rear room was the *Holy of Holies*. Samuel was resting on the floor in the *Holy Place* when the LORD called, and Samuel responded, "Here am I."

(3) How it Occurred (3:5-9)

Now Samuel tells us about his calling and how it occurred. Verse 5. "Then he ran to Eli and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' But he said, 'I did not call, lie down again.' So he went and lay down. ⁶The LORD called yet again, 'Samuel!' So Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' But he answered, 'I did not call, my son, lie down again.' ⁷Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, nor had the word of the LORD yet been revealed to him. ⁸So the LORD called Samuel again for the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' Then Eli discerned that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹And Eli said to Samuel, 'Go lie down, and it shall be if He calls you, that you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for Your servant is listening.' ' So Samuel went and lay down in his place." (3:5-9)

Three times the LORD called to Samuel. Three times Samuel faithfully ran to Eli, thinking that he was the one who had called. Samuel had never heard the voice of the LORD before this time, and he did not recognize the LORD's voice. But on the third call, as Samuel stood before Eli, Eli knew that it must have been the LORD who was calling Samuel.

(4) Why it Occurred

(a) A Message from the LORD (3:10-11)

Samuel returned to the *Holy Place* and waited. Samuel tells us why it occurred and why he heard a message from the LORD. Verse 10. "Then the LORD came and stood and called as at other times, 'Samuel! Samuel!' And Samuel said, 'Speak, for Your servant is listening.' ¹¹The LORD said to Samuel, 'Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle.' (3:10-11)

The reasons and the message given by the LORD were simple. The LORD said to Samuel, "Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle."

The LORD will use this same wording about five hundred years in the future when He will send the tyrant named Nebuchadnezzar to Jerusalem to destroy Solomon's Temple. It is found in two passages.

2 Kings 21:12 "therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Behold, I am bringing such calamity on Jerusalem and Judah, that whoever hears of it, both his ears will tingle.'

Jeremiah 19:3 "and say, 'Hear the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, 'Behold I am about to bring a calamity upon this place, at which the ears of everyone that hears of it will tingle.'

Both passages reference the same event of the destruction of Solomon's Temple. But what is the LORD speaking of in this passage that Samuel explains? What will occur in that Promised Land that

will cause every ear of the Israelites to *tingle*? Let us move on to discover what the LORD is about to do.

(b) A Message for Eli (3:12-14)

The thing that the LORD is about to do concerns Eli. The LORD had just spoken to Eli, now he is speaking to Samuel with a message for Eli. Verse 12. *"In that day I will carry out against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end.¹³ For I have told him that I am about to judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knew, because his sons brought a curse on themselves and he did not rebuke them.¹⁴ Therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever."* (3:12-14)

It is with word from the LORD, through the boy Samuel, to Eli, that we know that the event which will *tingle the ears* of every Israelite in the nation will occur on the day of the deaths of Eli's sons. It is also with this word that we know that the LORD has already spoken to Eli in a vision.

Samuel now had a job to do from the LORD. He must deliver the message to Eli. But how?

f) Samuel's Confession (3:15-18)

Eli knew that the LORD had spoken to Samuel, and he wanted to know what the LORD told Samuel. The next morning, Eli questions the boy to bring Samuel's confession. *"So Samuel lay down until morning. Then he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. But Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli.¹⁶ Then Eli called Samuel and said, 'Samuel, my son.' And he said, 'Here I am.'¹⁷ He said, 'What is the word that He spoke to you? Please do not hide it from me. May God do so to you, and more also, if you hide anything from me of all the words that He spoke to you.'¹⁸ So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, 'It is the LORD; let Him do what seems good to Him.'* (3:15-18)

Samuel confessed everything the LORD said to Eli. Notice Eli's response to Samuel. *"It is the LORD; let Him do what seems good to Him."* With Samuel's confession, Eli could not doubt that the LORD had indeed spoken to him in a vision. Samuel's word confirmed what the LORD had spoken to Eli. Eli could do nothing but accept the word of the LORD. But how soon would the LORD bring this about concerning Eli's family? We must remember, the LORD works on heaven's timeclock, not on earth's timeclock. So, with that, what does Samuel tell us next.

g) Samuel's Confirmation (3:19-4:1a)

We come to Samuel's confirmation about his call from the LORD. He does not speak here of the disaster about to come to Eli's family that will *tingle the ears* of the nation. Verse 19.

"Thus Samuel grew and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fail.²⁰ All Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the LORD.²¹ And the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, because the LORD revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD. Thus the word of Samuel came to all Israel." (3:19-21)

"Samuel grew" are the words that Samuel uses to tell us that as he grew into adulthood, the LORD was constantly with him. All the people of Israel, from the northernmost city of Dan to the southernmost city of Beersheba, recognized him as *"a prophet of the LORD."* When Samuel tells us that *"the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, because the LORD revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD,"* Samuel is telling us that the LORD spoke regularly to Samuel at Shiloh where the Tabernacle complex was sitting. It was not a one-time event. It was regular. And when the LORD had a message for all of Israel, He delivered it to Samuel who delivered it to the people.

Chapter 4

3. Samuel's Memory (4:1b-7:17)

a) The Defeat of Israel (4:1b-3a)

When the LORD had a word for Israel, He spoke it to Samuel at Shiloh, and Samuel delivered the message to all the people in the nation. In Samuel's memory, as he is recording the events of Israel during his life in this book, he comes to the time of the defeat of Israel by the Philistines. The time when all the *ears will tingle*. In the timeline of this book, Samuel has skipped over the life and death of Samson. There was no need to record it in this book; he had recorded it in the book of Judges. Samuel had seen fit not to record the information about his life in the book of Judges or the book of Ruth either. He kept the three separated; however, the three overlapped in the same time span in many places. Samson was dead at this time. Samuel was also well into his adulthood, many years after he was called by the LORD to be His prophet. Samuel was the spokesman for the LORD. He was stationed at Shiloh, where the Tabernacle sat. When the people needed a word from the LORD, they searched out Samuel at Shiloh, where the word of the LORD came through Samuel to all of Israel. Chapter 4, verse 1b. *"Now Israel went out to meet the Philistines in battle and camped beside Ebenezer while the Philistines camped in Aphek.² The Philistines drew up in battle array to meet Israel. When the battle spread, Israel was defeated before the Philistines who killed about four thousand men on the battlefield.³ When the people came into the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines?"* (4:1-3a)

Here we come to an interesting point. We must remember that Samuel is recording this event late in his life after most of the events he was alive to see had long since transpired. Here he tells of the battle defeat at a camp "*beside Ebenezer*." At the time of this battle, Samuel had not yet named the place Ebenezer. He will do so when the Israelites defeat the Philistines in the next battle, and he places a stone and names the place Ebenezer, meaning *the stone of help*. The placing of the stone will occur in chapter 7. But by the time Samuel writes this book, and it becomes public to the people of Israel, everyone will know where he placed the stone and named the area. Defeated, the elders of Israel questioned, "*Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines?*" Why did four thousand men of Israel die that day? The LORD had not sent them. Samuel had not sent them. They went to fight the Philistines without the LORD's permission. Why would they now blame the LORD for the defeat? Just as in the book of Judges, when the people did not call upon the name of the LORD for help in the battles against foreign nations, neither did the LORD help. Israel had not asked. The LORD had not helped.

b) The Desperation of Israel

(1) Israel Invokes the Power of the Ark of the Covenant (4:3b-5)

In the desperation of Israel, the nation took it upon itself to fix the battle problem. We see next where Israel invokes the power of the Ark of the Covenant without the permission of the LORD. Chapter 4, verse 3b. *"Let us take to ourselves from Shiloh the ark of the covenant of the LORD, that it may come among us and deliver us from the power of our enemies."*⁴ So the people sent to Shiloh, and from there they carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts who sits above the cherubim; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.⁵ As the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth resounded." (4:3b-5)

No doubt, the nation of Israel remembered that when their ancestors took the Promised Land originally, the Ark was present at every battle. They must have forgotten that the plan did not work on the first attempt in the city of Ai. Nevertheless, at this point in the story, the people thought that the Ark of the Covenant could ensure a victory over the Philistines. What did they do? They enlisted the services of Eli's two evil sons, who aided the nation in moving the Ark from its location

in Shiloh, where it had been for more than four hundred years, to the very place where the Philistines had just beat them down and about four thousand Israelites had died. A place that will one day be called Ebenezer. When the Ark arrived, the camp shouted so loud that the ground vibrated.

(2) Philistines Fear the Power of the Ark of the Covenant (4:6-9)

The Philistines knew the power of the Ark of the Covenant. They had heard the stories of old. The following passage shows that the Philistines fear the Power of the Ark of the Covenant. Verse 6. “*When the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, “What does the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews mean?” Then they understood that the ark of the LORD had come into the camp.*”⁷ *The Philistines were afraid, for they said, “God has come into the camp.” And they said, “Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before.*⁸ *Woe to us! Who shall deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods who smote the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the wilderness.*⁹ *Take courage and be men, O Philistines, or you will become slaves to the Hebrews, as they have been slaves to you; therefore, be men and fight.”* (4:6-9)

Clearly, the Philistines were afraid that the tide was about to turn. They were fearful that the Israelites were about to lord over them instead of them lording over the Israelites.